BEYOND SCHOOLS

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH OUT-OF-SCHOOL HIGH RISK CHILD GROUPS

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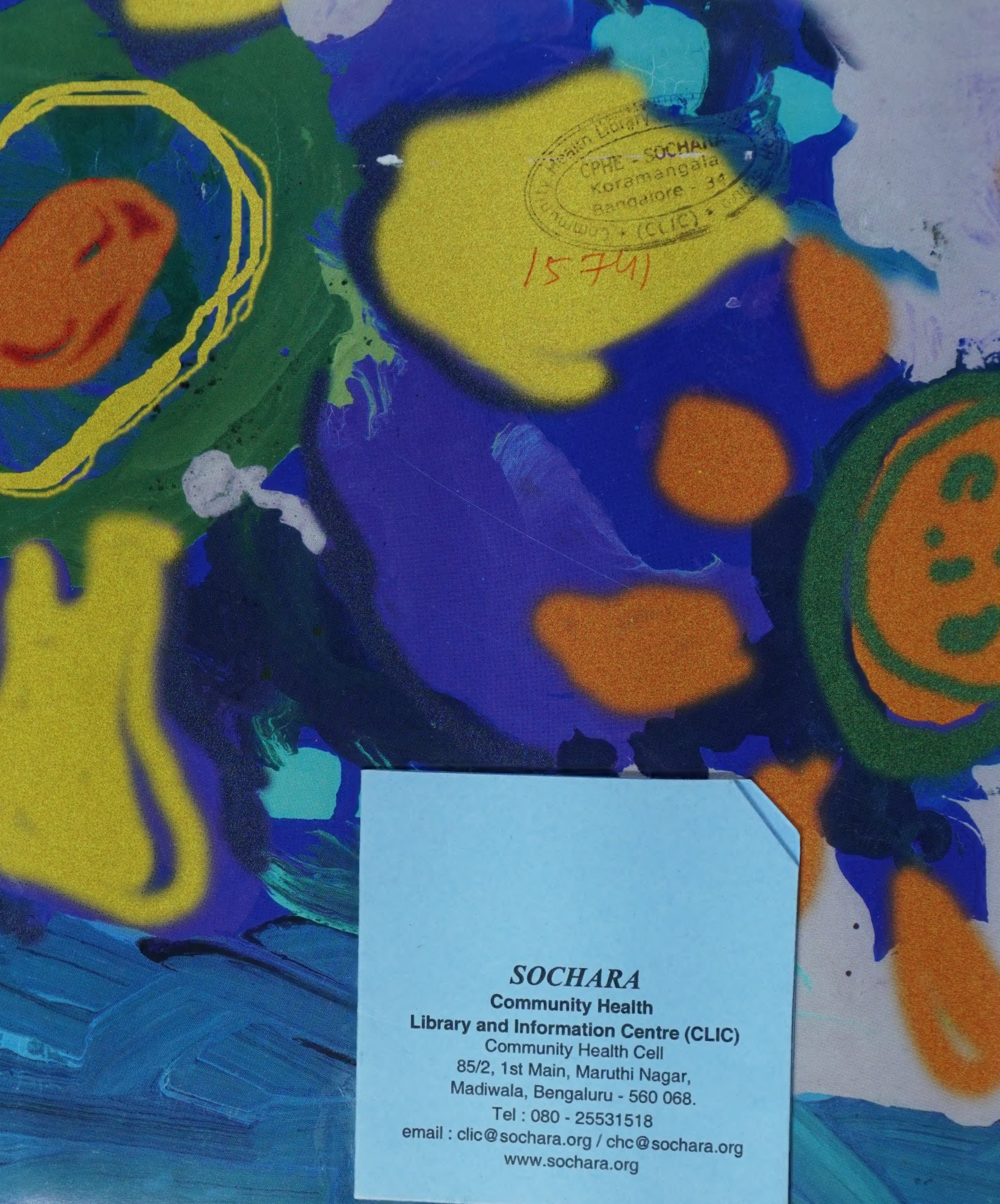

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Beyond Schools
Guidelines for Working with Out-of-School,
High Risk Child Groups

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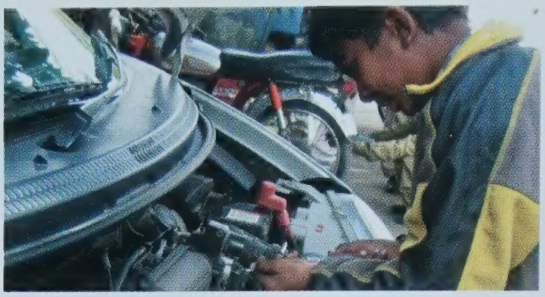

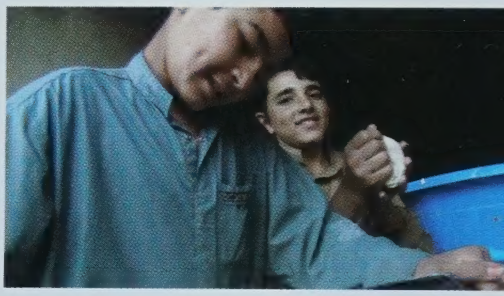

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Introduction

In the context of out-of-school children, life skills education can help children gain important information and develop essential skills that can protect them from violence, abuse, risky behaviour, disease and infection, and substance abuse.

One of the greatest factors impeding Pakistan's development is the lack of an adequate education system, which can accommodate and effectively educate the youth population present in the country. With Pakistan's youth under the age of 15 years swelling to amount to over 40% of the countries total population, the already challenged education sector has been unable to cope. In addition, the lack of resources and financial burdens many families experience, have kept a huge number of children out of school in order to allow them to earn money and contribute to their family income. Moreover, in the case of the girl child, many families choose not to spend their income on educating daughters, who will eventually marry out of the family and either contribute to their in-laws family income, or not earn at all and be a caretaker of the household. **The result is an overwhelming number of young children and adolescents, who are not a part of the formal school sector, yet are still in need of education, particularly when it concerns their health and well-being.** In particular, such children make their home on the street, become child labourers or join religious institutions *(Madrassas)* and hence, become vulnerable to many risks that school-going children are not exposed to on a daily basis. It is estimated, for example, that there are nine million children contributing to the workforce in an informal capacity in Pakistan *(United Nations Development Program, 2004).* In addition, it is estimated that over 70,000 children are living on the streets nationwide in Pakistan *(International Regional Information Networks - IRIN, 2005).*

In view of the current statistics, working with out-of-school youth and equipping them with survival skills becomes all the more important. Yet, working with out-of-school child groups can be extremely challenging and must take a different approach from traditional education methodology, as out-of-school youth lack experience in the formal school setting, and thus, have minimal reading and writing skills, and are exposed to multiple risk factors. Aahung *(an NGO working towards improving the sexual health scenario in Pakistan)* undertook a project to explore the possibilities of teaching Life Skills Education *(LSE)* to out-of-school youth. The following guidelines are based on Aahung's experience of working with children from a *Madrassa* located in Karachi.

Life skills "refers to a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions and actions toward others, as well as actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health" *(UNICEF).* In the context of out-of-school children, life skills education can help children gain important information and develop essential skills that can protect them from violence, abuse, risky behaviour, disease and infection, and substance abuse. In addition, life skills can help out-of-school children to acquire more effective communication, negotiation and refusal skills, as well as develop gender sensitivity and tolerance for diversity. With such a huge number of children not going to school formally in Pakistan, Aahung felt it important to explore methodologies required to work with out-of-school children.

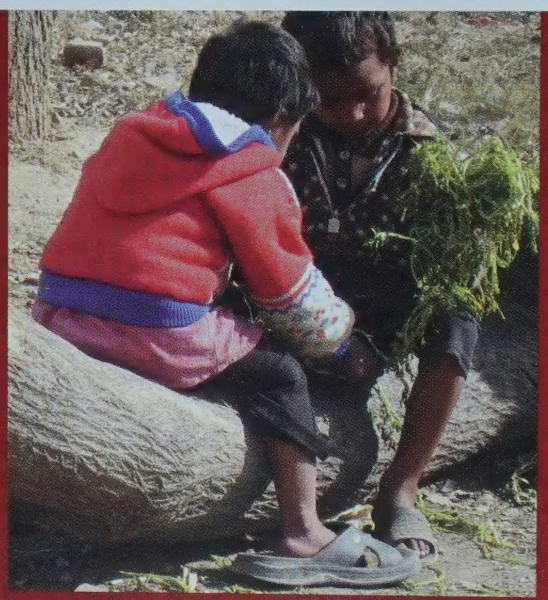
A Case Study
Faizan-e-Mustafa Madrassa Workshops

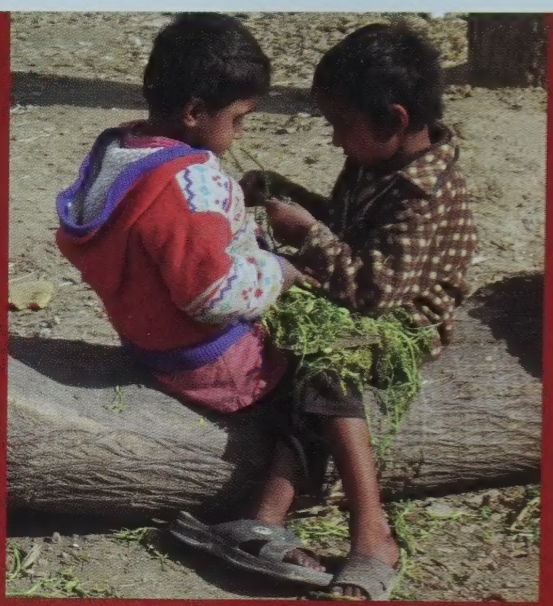
The particular group of children Aahung worked with over the course of four months belonged to a local *Madrassa in Mohammadi Colony (also known as Machar Colony).*

While the particular group of children were living in a controlled environment that was structured like a boarding school, they were not literate and were vulnerable to a number of risk factors. As with other vulnerable out-of-school child groups, the children in the *Madrassa* have little access to information regarding their health and well-being and few social skills. In addition, life outside of the *Madrassa* also poses a number of risks for the children, as *Machar Colony* is a severely underdeveloped and overpopulated "katchi abadi" *(slum area).* The colony itself consists of primarily Bangladeshi, Pathan, and Burmese communities, who rely on the local fishing industry for their income. While there are 24 schools in the colony, as well as 4 *Madrassas,* few children have access to metric level education and many finish their schooling at the primary level. Moreover, basic health conditions in the colony are poor, as an inefficient sewage canal runs through the settlement and drains into the sea, and water is obtained illegally from a pipeline. In a survey conducted by Concern for Children *(CFC),* 90% of the water in the colony was contaminated. Basic healthcare is also difficult to access, as the 80 clinics in the area do not employ qualified doctors, but rather rely on homeopaths and untrained paramedical staff for medical treatment. With electricity problems, garbage being dumped on the streets and a lack of natural gas supply, the conditions of the colony clearly pose as a health hazard for the residents.

While the children who reside in *Machar Colony* are exposed to a number of health risks and are given little information with regards to how they can protect themselves from harm, they are a small sample set of what many children across Pakistan face. As a result, Aahung's

The guidelines attempt to assist facilitators in identifying the social and cognitive problems that should be anticipated when working with children who have not had exposure to the formal school system, and belong to low economic, disadvantaged communities.

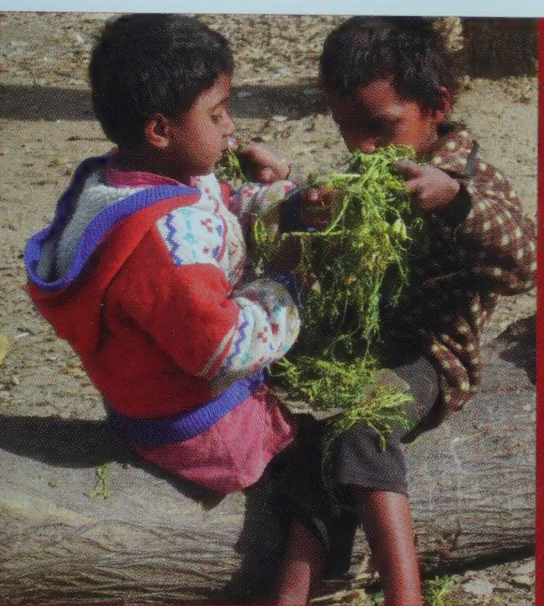


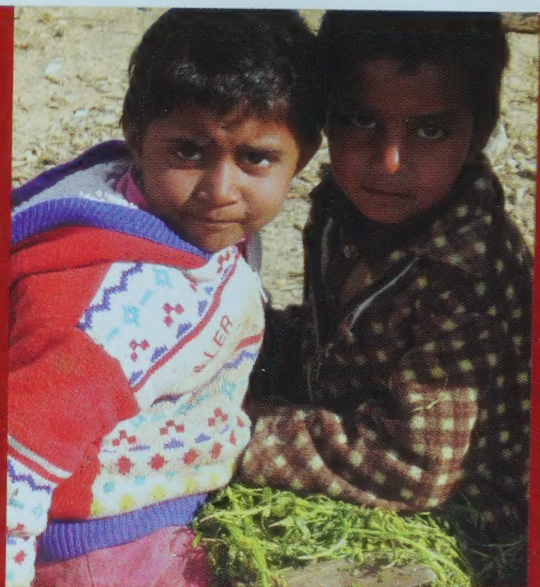


experience with providing information with regards to health and well-being to young people needed to be expanded to account for children and young people who do not have access to the formal school sector, yet require information and life skills.

As a result, Aahung conducted a number of workshops over the course of three months with the children living in the Faizan-e-Mustafa *Madrassa,* to begin to learn about the challenges of working with vulnerable child groups. The workshops were scheduled to take place twice a week with one session being held in the *Madrassa,* and the other session being held in the Aahung office to provide a change of scenery and create a comfortable environment for the children. The workshops began with eleven boys in attendance, but soon grew to include seventeen boys who attended consistently, along with a number of other boys who participated from time to time. From the workshops that were conducted, the following guidelines have been developed which address problems that were faced in working with out-of-school children, and the solutions that Aahung facilitators used to overcome the challenges.

The guidelines attempt to assist facilitators in identifying the social and cognitive problems that should be anticipated when working with children who have not had exposure to the formal school system, and belong to low economic, disadvantaged communities. While the specific vulnerabilities and risk factors that exist for various groups of children who belong to different out-of-school sectors will vary, the problems associated with a lack of schooling will, to some extent, be shared among the various groups. In addition, while some high-risk situations may be more prominent for certain groups *(child labourers, for example, are often exposed to hazardous working conditions that can lead to sustained injuries and physical harm, while children living on the streets are often more susceptible to sexual abuse and drug addiction),* the risky conditions that many children face, who are not in the formal school sector, tend to overlap in a number of ways.





The Problems

General problems that need to be overcome

The immediate challenges of working with children who have not been involved in the formal school sector predominantly stem from the lack of certain skills being developed through education.

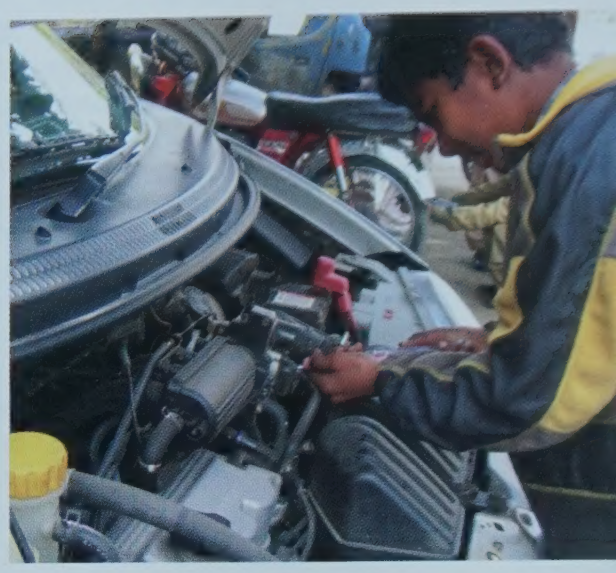
Illiteracy

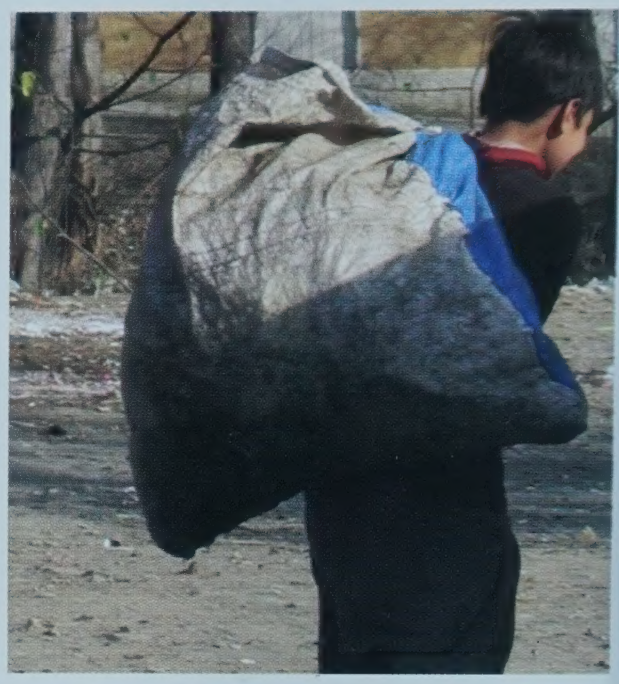
Illiteracy is perhaps the most apparent problem that facilitators are confronted with, as working with children who cannot read or write can be very challenging. In the case of the children who lived in the *Madrassa,* the boys could recite Arabic, as they had been taught to read the text for the purpose of memorizing the *Qur'an.* However, no reading material, or writing activities could be conducted with the children, as they were completely illiterate otherwise. Simple brainstorming activities used by facilitators were also difficult to conduct, as notes and comments are often written on flip charts. As a result, the primary challenge of conducting life skills workshops with out-of-school children becomes developing activities that are suitable for use with illiterate children.

Motor Skills and Communication Skills

The lack of schooling for many children, also results in developmental problems with regards to basic skill building. As most children begin to develop their basic skill set in their primary school years, children who do not attend school or spend a majority of their time engaged in labour from a young age often do not have the opportunity to develop such skills, which can include basic motor skills and communication skills. In the case of the *Madrassa* children, along with being illiterate, the boys faced a great deal of difficulty manipulating writing tools and drawing. As the facilitators turned to images and pictures as a way of teaching the children, they were asked to complete activities through drawing as opposed to writing. Many of the boys could not hold the colour pencils steadily and a majority of them had great difficulty making simple images and pictures. It is important to point out that certain other motor skills may be better developed than is expected. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds are often given chores at a young age and are expected to dress and bathe themselves without a great deal of assistance, thus improving practical motor skills rapidly.

In addition to motor skills, it appears that out-of-school children often do not have the opportunity to effectively develop their communication skills. As the school environment not only ideally allows children to participate in the learning process, but also provides an opportunity for children to interact with one another academically and socially. Children who do not have access to such as environment can often become isolated or spend a majority of their time in settings where they are not encouraged or not allowed to communicate and interact freely. In the case of the *Madrassa* children, the boys were very hesitant to speak out and express themselves. A majority of the children would not participate in conversation, and while there were a handful of boys who were outspoken, for the most part a great deal of cajoling was involved in getting the boys to offer an opinion, or answer a question posed by one of the facilitators.





As most children begin to develop their basic skill set in their primary school years, children who do not attend school or spend a majority of their time engaged in labour from a young age often do not have the opportunity to develop such skills

Background Experiences

Finally, one of most significant challenges faced when working with out-of-school children involves taking into account the background that such children have most likely experienced. As stated previously, each group of children is different in terms of their vulnerabilities and risks, however, the significant point is that for the most part, out-of-school children have already experienced a great deal of risky situations. In the case of the *Madrassa* children, the sheltered life they lead with infrequent exposure to anyone outside of the *Madrassa,* and the limited activities they engage in on a daily basis *(praying and reading the Qur'an, with a one-half hour play time in the evenings)* resulted in them experiencing a great deal of difficulty relating to their outside environment. Initial workshops were spent with the children drawing images of *masjids* and only discussing activities that related to life in the *Madrassa.* The facilitators had to ease the children out of simply discussing their life inside the religious school to help them to start thinking about other aspects of their life *(such as their families, goals, opinions, likes and dislikes).*

Illiteracy is perhaps the most apparent problem that facilitators are confronted with, as working with children who cannot read or write can be very challenging.

Sexual Abuse and Drug Use

In the case of other vulnerable child groups, life experiences will also almost inevitably be significantly different from those anticipated with school-going children. For example, young boys living on the street are often inevitably exposed to sexual abuse and drug use, making their experience and development very distinct from many school-going children. Of course, children in school are also exposed to risk factors, such as abuse and violence *(which is why an urgency for life skills education to be integrated into schools also exists),* however for children in high-risk groups, such as those living on the streets, it is a norm and often a means of survival. The important point for facilitators working with children from the informal sector to remember is, that the background of the children needs to be assessed so that the methodology, approach and content of the workshop can be designed accordingly. A glaring example exists when a comparison is made between workshops Aahung facilitators have conducted with children living on the street and children living in a *Madrassa.* **The children from the street had a great deal of difficulty paying attention for prolonged periods of time, and activities that were designed had to be short and highly interactive. On the other hand, the children from the Madrassa had extremely high attention spans as they were used to reading the Qur'an for prolonged periods of time.** The common theme, however, is that the background experiences of the children has resulted in them having a particular development pattern which is vital for facilitators to investigate and understand before beginning activities.

Tackling the Problems

Facilitator Strategies for Effectively Running Workshops:

While some of the general problems faced by facilitators working with out-of-school children have already been stated, a number of challenges will inevitably be dependent on the particular group of children selected for workshops. As a result, facilitators will have to gauge how each challenge can be effectively met and dealt with along with what strategies can be employed to best deal with the issues at hand. From Aahung's experience working with the *Madrassa* children, a number of general strategies for working with out-of-school children emerged:

Creating a Comfortable Environment

It is essential that the workshops take place in an environment where the children feel comfortable and safe. A number of factors contribute to a comfortable environment. These can include the type of seating, number of adult facilitators present in the room, presence of instructors or adults the children interact with outside of the workshop, and the number of children participating in the workshop. It is recommended that:

- An environment be created in which the children feel that they can interact with the facilitators easily. This often requires everyone to be seated at an equal level *(floor seating is usually the easiest way of achieving this equality).*
- In addition, the ratio of facilitators to children should be enough so that each child is visible and given individual attention *(usually one facilitator for every 5-10 children will suffice).*
- The presence of other adults in the workshop room is fine if the children feel more comfortable, but if the discussion is being impeded, or there is obvious discomfort amongst the children, then other adults should be asked to leave during the workshop.

It is essential that the workshops take place in an environment where the children feel comfortable and safe.

Activity-based Learning

Most children who have had no formal schooling will have little to no literacy skills, and thus, educational sessions must be adapted to meet their needs.

- Activities must be developed that allow facilitators to impart valuable knowledge and build necessary skills without the support of reading and writing tools.
- In addition, the activities need to be culturally specific and relevant to the background experiences of the group of children.
- Facilitators came to rely on relaying information through the use of theatre, games, drawing exercises and discussion to work with the children constructively.

Most children who have had no formal schooling will have little to no literacy skills, educational sessions must be adapted to meet their needs.

taining Attention Span

eater activity involved in lesson he more likelihood that the attention f the children will be maintained, en they will remember a great deal s well through hands on activities. e cases, certain lessons may be ifficult than others to make hands- ticularly when they are pre- antly information based. In such it is usually advisable to develop vity supplementing the information esson plan so that information can ner absorbed by the participants.

atively, if an activity cannot be used g to the lesson, it is necessary to in the interest of the children by short breaks where they can engage hands-on activity to allow them to s for upcoming sessions or ation. Such activities can include ng, playing a short game, working aper and scissors, etc.

Same Sex Facilitators

While more girls than boys are realistically out-of-school in Pakistan *(57 percent of boys and 44 percent of girls are enrolled at the primary school level and 46 percent of boys and only 32 percent of girls are enrolled at the secondary school level according to the World Education News and Reviews – WENR, Jan/Feb, 2005),* boys tend to be a part of the vulnerable child groups made up of child labourers, children living on the street and in *Madrassas.* As a result, it is often essential that a facilitator of the same sex be present for the sessions as the children may possibly find it easier to relate to, and trust, someone of the same sex. In the case of the boys from the *Madrassa,* their limited interaction with females may have been a contributing factor to why they interacted more readily with Aahung's male facilitators.

Appropriate Topics

Topics that need to be explored with vulnerable child groups are discussed in these guidelines, and suggested activities have also been described that were successfully run with the *Madrassa* children. All of the activities can be adapted and the content changed to suit the needs and level of understanding of the group of children in question.

Topics That Need to be Addressed With Out-of-School Children

All children depending on age, sex, socio-economic background, experience, family, etc., are vulnerable to risks and require appropriate information and skills to safeguard their health and well being depending on their particular circumstances. For the most part, however, children who do not have access to formal schooling often miss out on receiving information regarding basic health and behavioural risks. While the particular set of topics that are explored with out-of-school children should be dependent on their needs, these guidelines list a number of topics that have already been tested by Aahung. Depending on the needs of the children identified by facilitators, the content and level of complexity of the topics can be changed and adapted accordingly.

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HEALTH & HYGIENE

Health And Hygiene

Information on basic health and hygiene is usually acquired from a young age in the home, and then supplemented with further information during primary school years. Often, children who do not attend school and come from particularly crowded households do not gain access to such vital information, and are frequently exposed to cultural myths. Such myths and lack of information can result in health complications later on in life. In the case of Madrassa children, basic information on hygiene seemed to be present, although the relationship between practicing hygiene rituals and maintaining good health was not well understood.

Basic hygiene rituals such as brushing one's teeth and washing one's hands before eating were explored with reference to germs and maintenance of healthy behaviours. The group session was then expanded to include a broader discussion of various factors that can make us ill or feel unwell, such as unclean water, dirty food, and getting germs from others who do not have good hygiene rituals. While children will probably have some sense of factors that can contribute to disease, they may be unclear or believe in myths that they have heard. **Thus, a discussion on health, provides facilitator's with an opportunity to not only discuss contributing factors to health, but also allows room for dispelling myths and addressing health issues that have never previously been discussed due to feelings of shame or discomfort.**

Drugs

In relation to health, substance abuse is also a crucial issue that needs to be addressed with out-of-school children as they are often exposed to substances at a very early age. Exposure to cigarettes, and drugs such as inhalants *(glue - Samad Bond)* and marijuana is common for children who spend a great deal of time in unsupervised environments such as the streets. As a result, information on the effects of substances on the body and health is important for facilitators to share with out-of-school children. While the group of *Madrassa* children was rather young to discuss the hazardous effect of drugs in great detail, discussion of addiction and health complications was conducted. Further extrapolation on drug needles as a mode of transmitting infection could also be discussed with high-risk child groups.

Health and Hygiene Activiti

Flashcards

Objective: To discuss topics of basic health and hygiene with the participants

Approximate time: 45 minutes

Tools: Flashcards showing images of basic hygiene rituals *(washing hair, washing hands, brushing teeth, etc.)*

Activity: Children can remain in a large group while the facilitator holds up the cards. Each of the cards is discussed individually until important points regarding the hygiene rituals depicted are discussed.

Sample questions:

1. What is happening in the picture?
2. Is this an important activity? If so why?
3. How does this help us to stay clean?
4. How is cleanliness related to health *(discussion of germs is appropriate at this point)?*
5. How often do you carry out this hygiene ritual? Do you think you should do it more often?
6. How do you feel when you are unwell?
7. Based on how you feel when you are unwell, what do you think the value of good health is? How does it help us to be healthy and well?

(Note: The discussion track for question 7 can be kept very simple and can also become quite complex depending on the maturity and level of understanding of the participants).

Facilitators note: The complexity of the discussion should be based on the experience level of the participants. The objective of the discussion is to have the children be able to understand the importance of hygiene rituals as well as develop a broader understanding of the value of health.

Distribution of Hygienic Products:

Objective: To use actual products to teach children about hygiene rituals and encourage the adoption of healthy hygiene rituals.

Approximate time: 45 minutes

Tools: Toothbrush, toothpaste, dentonic, *miswak,* soap, any other products used in daily hygiene rituals.

Activity: Products are distributed to each of the children and each product is discussed in terms of its contribution to hygiene.

Facilitator's note: The distribution of products also serves as an incentive for the children to participate in the discussion. Distributing little "rewards" can be used as an effective tool to help get discussion started or to encourage children when they have participated in an exercise well.

The discussion of hygiene and distribution products should be limited to child groups that have access to water and supplies that allow basic hygiene rituals to be carried out. Children who reside on the street, for example, may not have daily access to water and be able to maintain cleanliness making discussions on the subject futile.

Often, children who are not attend school and come from particularly crowded house- holds do not gain access to vital information and are especially exposed to cultural myth s.

COMMUNICATION

Communication

Communication skills are developed during primary school years when children start to socialize in their school environment. In addition, within households, children who are encouraged to voice their opinions and feelings, develop effective communication skills that can help them build stronger relationships during their adult years. Strong communication skills are also vital for young people to become assertive, protect their body and health effectively, and express themselves in an emotionally healthy manner. Children who do not have access to school environments, however, often are not provided with the opportunity to start building their communication skills. In addition, children from vulnerable groups often do not have the emotional support they require and do not have trusted adults they can access for guidance and support. As a result, during their childhood years, out-of-school children often do not have the communication skills to verbalize their concerns, pressures, health problems, and any occurrence of abuse, etc. Aahung facilitators found that in the case of the Madrassa children, their communication skills are often further stifled by the environment in which they live. A majority of their day is spent reciting and there is little emphasis given to other forms of communication and discussion in classrooms and amongst the children themselves.

With regards to health and well being, communication skills are essential as they allow children, young people and adults to express their concerns more effectively.

Often, the guilt and shame that is associated with the body prevents young people from seeking answers to questions they may have about both emotional and physical development. In addition, such shame also prevents adults from seeking professional help with regards to their health problems.

Effective communication can also help people build strong relationships, and voice their pressures and emotional stress during their adult years, thus assisting in anger management and overall emotional stability.

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Communication Activities:

Facilitator's note: A number of activities can be developed to help children start the process of effective communication. It is important to remember however, that communication is a skill, which is gradually learned and it cannot be expected that children will be able to express themselves effectively all of a sudden. The key is that facilitators start helping children to express their thoughts, feelings and concerns in a constructive way using the workshop activities as a tool. Aahung facilitators chose the area of the five human senses to help the children start to discuss their feelings in a tangible manner. Each activity that was conducted through the course of the workshops, however, had an element of communication included, as the children were constantly encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions.

Using the Senses:

Objective: To have children explore the ways in which senses help us to observe the world around us and express ourselves.

Approximate time: 1 hour

Tools: Five props that can easily be associated with the 5 senses (smell, touch, sight, sound and taste).

Activity: Each sense is discussed after sharing the corresponding set of props with the children. For example, for hearing, the children were asked to close their eyes and listen to the sounds made by props such as a plastic bag, pouring water, and tapping a spoon on a plate. With each sound made, they were encouraged to identify the sound as well as discuss how the sound was being made in as much detail as possible. The remaining senses are then explored in a similar manner. The purpose of the exercise is to have the children begin to express themselves through focusing on the senses with regards to what they hear, see, feel etc. Later, these senses can then be applied to start discussing more complex emotions and feelings.

Drawing Everyday Life:

Objective: To provide children with an opportunity to express themselves through drawing and create a platform for discussion about the routine of their lives.

Approximate time: 45 minutes

Tools: Large sheets of white paper, colour pencils or markers

Activity: Divide the group of children into smaller groups of 2-4 children each. Assign one day of the week to each group of children and ask them to depict using symbols and pictures only, their routine from the time they wake up to the time they go to bed on their given day of the week.

After the chronological drawings are complete, each group should present their work with every member of the group contributing to the presentation. Symbols can be explained and facilitators can ask the children about any parts of the day that are particularly enjoyable or disagreeable.

Sample questions for discussion

1. What part of the day is your favourite and why?
2. Which day of the week is your favourite and why?
3. What part of the day do you dislike and why?

SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE

Self-Esteem and Confidence

Self-esteem can be defined as how a person accepts and respects themselves overall as a human being, while self confidence refers to how aware a person is of their capabilities, talents, knowledge and ability to accomplish what they set out to do. Self-esteem and self-confidence are both key topics to work on with children of all ages and from all backgrounds, as they provide a platform for building skills in children. Without a sense of self-confidence, skills that are being taught to children often cannot be effectively utilized. For example, when teaching children how to protect themselves from abuse by refusing to allow someone to touch them inappropriately, a great deal of self-confidence is required for a child to actually say "no" to a physically and mentally stronger adult.

Similarly, for young people to refuse peer pressure in all circumstances requires a great deal of self-confidence, willpower and belief in their personal set of values. Out-of-school children require a great deal of focus on their self-confidence and self-esteem as they are rarely provided with an environment in which they are encouraged, motivated or rewarded for their achievements. However, they are exposed to a number of risky situations in which they must use skills and rely on their self-confidence to avoid putting their health at risk. In addition, building self-esteem in out-of-school children is important to help them to take advantage of opportunities and reach their full potential as adults while effectively dealing with the challenges of life.

Self-esteem and Confidence Building Activities:

Facilitator's note: It is important to keep in mind that self confidence and self esteem building can be developed without the use of particular activities. While activities can help the process, building up the confidence of children in group sessions is a slow, continuous process. Consistent praise and encouragement when participants reveal talents, or complete a task well can build a great deal of confidence over a short period of time, which will help children to absorb and grasp further skills more easily and readily.

Self Portraits

Objective: To have students begin to think about their positive qualities and express themselves regarding their positive attributes.

Approximate time: 1 hour

Note: This exercise is difficult for a lot of children as their motor skills can be poor and they may not have had any experience drawing before. Facilitators may need to help children a great deal during the exercise and encourage them if they get frustrated with the way their product is turning out.

Tools: White paper, crayons or colour pencils, small mirrors.

Activity: Children are asked to look at themselves in the mirror and study themselves. They are then asked to draw a portrait of themselves *(without defining if the portrait should be of just the face or include parts of the body).* Facilitators can join in on the exercise to make the children feel more comfortable. Once the drawings are complete, the children are asked to mark on their drawings what they like about themselves. The children are then asked to hold up the pictures and discuss why they like the parts of their face or body that they chose.

When teaching children how to protect themselves from abuse by refusing to allow someone to touch them inappropriately, a great deal of self-confidence is required for a child to actually say "no" to a physically and mentally stronger adult.

VIOLENCE

Violence

Violence appears to be a part of everyday life for vulnerable children, particularly if they are put in an environment where they have little power and means of support. While school-going children can often be victims of violence, in the case of out-of-school children, violence is often a language they use in and of itself. In other words, the kinds of environments out of school children, particularly boys, are often exposed to foster the use of violence as a tool for power and dominance. In addition, the lack of support system for the children often makes them victims of violence because they have no where to turn to for assistance. In the case of the Madrassa children, they were violent to one another, with older boys frequently physically hitting younger ones. In addition, the boys explained in great detail how they were physically punished by their teachers. The physical and mental abuse that children in Madrassa settings can experience is also present for other vulnerable child groups. Children who live on the street, for example, are often exposed to such violence along with sexual abuse, which leaves them susceptible to disease and infection. Teaching children skills to be able to protect themselves from abuse can be complicated if there is no existent support network a child can rely upon.

Often the only way in which children can protect themselves is by seeking the help of a trusted adult who can help to protect them. In the case of vulnerable children, the option to seek the help of an adult usually does not exist. While children can still be taught refusal skills and be informed about places where they can potentially seek help, it is difficult to expect that the children will be able to protect themselves entirely from a lifestyle and culture, which uses violence as a means of communication.

One product of violence in many children, however, which can be effectively addressed by facilitators, is that of anger. Anger is a common emotional outcome of violence and abuse, and can often lead to the child becoming an abuser him/herself. For example, during theatre activities that were run with children from the Madrassa, several skits that were enacted involved violent scenes depicted within families. Often, the scenes involved one person being beaten, which lead to a domino effect of violence between the family members of the home. While the everyday occurrence of violence amongst vulnerable children often results in habituation, the negative emotional impact still occurs and is managed by each child in a different way. Often the lack of management skills for emotional stress and a support system results in unhealthy displays of emotions and the inability to manage anger effectively.

The kinds of environments out-of- school children, particularly boys, are often exposed to foster the use of violence as a tool for power and dominance.

Activities for Anger Management:

Finding outlets for anger

Objective: To help children find healthy means of releasing anger and to prevent the use of physical force or violence as a source of anger management.

Approximate time: 45 minutes

Tools: Large cushions

Description of Activity: Each child is asked to leave the room turn by turn and stand outside, preferably in the open air. When outside, the participants are instructed to yell as loudly as they can, and then re-enter the room so that the next child can go outside. Following the yelling exercise, pillows are distributed to the children *(if the workshop has been run using floor seating, they can simply use the pillows they are seated upon)*. Each child is asked to punch and hit the pillow as much as they like and for as long as they want to. Once the punching exercise is complete, the children are asked to sit down in a group circle again for discussion.

Discussion questions:

1. How did you feel during the yelling exercise?
2. How did you feel during the punching exercise?
3. When you feel angry, how do you release your anger so that it becomes less or goes away?
4. Do you think sometimes that you use physical force when you are angry?
5. What are the benefits of taking out your anger in other ways, such as the two examples you experimented with today?

Facilitators note: The exercise is an enjoyable one for the children because it is an outlet for behaving in a manner, which is usually not allowed. It is important for facilitators to regain the attention of the children after the exercise, however, to make sure that they understand through the discussion that the exercises are an example of how anger can be managed more effectively.

Facilitators can also ask children what they think will help them to manage their anger more effectively and prevent physical violence.

Theatre Activity for Exploring Anger

Objective: To help children express emotions through the use of theatre, and to focus on situations that can bring about feelings of anger.

Approximate time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Tools: Any simple props requested by the children for their skits

Activity description: The children are broken down into smaller groups, preferably of 3-4 depending on the number of participants. Each group is then simply assigned a feeling, such as happiness, sadness, and anger. Based on the feeling assigned, each group should develop a short skit, which displays physical and emotional characteristics associated with that feeling. Facilitators should encourage the participants to be creative and expressive while developing their skits.

Facilitator's note: The exercise is useful for helping children start to begin to express themselves more effectively. It is also helpful in creating a platform for discussion about the lives the children lead as their skits will probably include an element of their own experiences in them. For example, the skits done by the *Madrassa* children reflected their lives almost entirely. Practically all of the skits were based within the *Madrassa*, with different aspects of their lives being used to reflect different emotions. For example, the group of children working on depicting happiness put on a skit, which showed four boys playing cricket during their break time. The skits are also useful in exploring feelings of anger that the children might have, and how they manage their anger.

GENDER

Gender

The socio-cultural segregation of men and women in Pakistan has resulted in an environment, which perpetuates gender stereotypes and discrimination. Such segregation starts at a very early age. In early childhood, and more drastically during puberty, girls and boys are discouraged from interacting with one another too extensively, and the segregation is further enhanced by girls becoming limited to the domestic sphere while boys are granted social mobility. Schools further provide opportunities for segregation, as few schools are co-educational. For out-of-school children, segregation from the opposite sex in daily social interaction is no different than for school going children. Children who have families are predominantly exposed to the opposite sex within the framework of their family. Children who are orphaned, or who have left their families usually only interact with members of their own sex.

In the case of the children from the *Madrassa*, they were continuously exposed to an all male environment.While some children did leave the *Madrassa* once a week to visit their homes, their interaction was limited to that with women in their family. Furthermore, their only opportunity for developing an understanding of relationships is from observing interactions in their family, which may be abusive and devoid of respect. The result of such segregation is a clear lack of understanding of the opposite sex and the encouragement of gender stereotypes. The consequences of such an environment, which are already apparent in Pakistan, are early marriages, gender discrimination, lack of equality in relationships, violence and abuse, and power imbalance.

Activities for Gender Sensitization

Discussion of household roles:

Objective: To have children begin thinking about the gender roles through exploring the responsibilities of different members of the family, specifically mothers and fathers.

Approximate time: 45 minutes

Tools: Flipchart for record keeping (the children may or may not be able to read the phrases and words written down but it is important for later discussion that the facilitators record comments).

Activity description: As a large group, children are asked to brainstorm all of the chores that their mothers do for their children. Each chore is recorded by the facilitators for further discussion.

Discussion questions:

1. Does it seem as though mothers have a great deal of responsibilities?
2. Are the chores that they usually do important? If so why?
3. Do you think that sometimes we may take all the work that women do for granted?
4. Do you think you could complete any of these chores?
5. Do you think that men in general can help with any of these chores?

Facilitators note:

- The brainstorming session conducted with the *Madrassa* children resulted in the identification of 66 separate errands conducted by women for the household. To get the children thinking, many activities they name can be further broken down into chores that need to be completed prior to completing any one activity. For example, before making *roti*, women may need to manually create a fire, buy the flour, knead the dough, etc.
- During the course of discussion, it is important to help the children begin to think about the concept of gender while discussing the "role" of women. Questions are supposed to have children begin thinking not only about the prescribed gender role of women as valuable to society, but also that gender roles are in and of themselves a social construct. Sensitizing the children to gender is a difficult task as their experience and exposure is probably limited. However, by exploring the definition of sex *(biological)* and gender *(social)* through everyday activities and the structure of the household, there is a greater chance that children will begin to be able to understand that gender roles are developed by society.

Household chore game:

Objective: To better understand the already existing gender stereotypes the children have, and to start to distinguish between gender and sex.

Approximate time: 1 hour

Tools: List of general household chores such as washing dishes, cleaning clothes, cooking food, fixing broken electronic equipment, buying groceries, etc. *(if the children cannot read, then the list can simply be read out by the facilitators).*

Description of activity: Three facilitators are to stand in different areas of the room. One facilitator is titled "just boys," another "just girls," and the last "both girls and boys." Each of the common household chores is read from the list one at a time. With each chore that is read, each of the children need to independently decide whether the chore can be completed only by boys, only by girls or both girls and boys could complete it. When they decide, each child needs to move to the facilitator holding the appropriate sign they agree with. When all of the children have moved to the facilitators, the number of children in each group should be counted and recorded by the facilitators. When the number of children in each group has

been recorded, the children can be asked to move back to the center of the room in preparation to hear the next chore on the list. Gradually each chore is read until the list is complete. After the entire activity is complete, each chore can be discussed separately using discussion questions.

Discussion questions:

1. Why did you choose the category that you did?
2. Is there a difference between saying that "only" girls or boys can complete an activity and "usually" girls or boys are the ones to complete the activity in question?

In early childhood, and more drastically during puberty, girls and boys are discouraged from interacting with one another too extensively, and the segregation is further enhanced by girls becoming limited to the domestic sphere while boys are granted social mobility.

3. Thinking about the activities again, are there any that you still think only one or the other can complete?
4. Why do we think that girls and boys are supposed to be able to do certain activities/chores? Where do these ideas come from?

Facilitator's note: The activity is structured like a game to make it more enjoyable for the children but since a serious discussion needs to come out of it, facilitators need to encourage the children to think for themselves and choose categories with honesty rather than copying one another.

Further Topics

Depending on the needs of the particular group of children, a number of other topics can also be explored. For children living on the street, for example, it may be necessary to discuss sexually transmitted infections and protection, as they are often sexually active and sexually abused from a very young age. In the case of the Madrassa children, a great deal of emphasis was given to discussing diversity through the course of the workshops. The children not only had little exposure to the opposite sex, but they also had very stringent views on religion, practices, culture and traditions. Even amongst themselves, boys often split up into groups based on their ethnic background *(Bengali vs. Burmese)*. Through the course of the workshops, wherever possible, discussions on tolerance and humanity were included to try and develop an understanding of diversity. Further topics that facilitators choose to explore should be based on the needs of the group of children, which can also continue to emerge through the course of the sessions. Some topics include:

- Human rights
- Setting goals
- Conflict resolution
- Finding help
- Puberty and body changes
- Decision-making

Through the course of the workshops, wherever possible, discussions on tolerance and humanity were included to try and develop an understanding of diversity

Confronting Problems While Working With Children Outside of the Formal School System

Effectiveness of Training

As stated previously, out-of-school children are often vulnerable to a host of risks that come from the environment in which they live and work. Part of the problem of working with such groups of children is being able to assess whether workshops make a significant enough difference to protecting out-of-school children from high risks. While the workshops and training sessions can potentially offer important health and life skills information to children, they will inevitably go back to their high risk environment after the training sessions are complete. Such an environment may not allow the participants to put into practice the information and skills acquired during workshops. In the case of the *Madrassa* children, for example, it can be anticipated that even though a great deal of emphasis was given to managing anger and conflicts during workshops, once the children were back in their environment, violence became a way of life once again. Workshops can protect children by providing them with valuable information and essential skills, however they cannot change the environment in which out-of-school children often reside. The health and safety compromises that children make in such environments can clearly compromise the effectiveness of trainings. Hence, it is all the more important to work with, in this case, teachers at the *Madrassa,* in order to initiate a change in the residential environment.

Skill-Building

While knowledge about health is vital for out-of school children, skills are required if behaviour change is expected to occur. Effective social skills are essential so that children can use their acquired knowledge constructively. However, skill building is a slow process, which requires steady interaction with children. Building negotiation, refusal and analytical skills for example, along with confidence and self-esteem requires facilitators to interact with children over an extended period of time. In the case of out-of-school children, conducting regular workshops with the children is often challenging due to their lifestyle, environment, work requirements, and lack of schedule. In addition to having difficulty meeting the children regularly, carrying out workshops over an extended period of time may also be challenging. As a result, skill building in out-of-school children, which is necessary for their protection, is a challenge to facilitators.

Broaching Sensitive Topics

Another challenge of conducting workshops with out-of-school children is how to handle and broach sensitive subject matter. Often, children in high risk environments are vulnerable to sexual abuse. While it is possible to inform children about how they can better protect themselves, an important part of protection is encouraging children to tell a trusted adult about any incidences of abuse. Many children at risk of abuse who are made vulnerable by their environment do not have any trusted adults or support system that they can access. The lack of a proper support system makes working on sensitive topics such as abuse problematic for facilitators.

Monitoring Tools

Related to the issue of being able to determine the efficacy of the training workshops is the issue of monitoring and evaluation. It is vital for facilitators to be able to assess how much of a difference, quantitatively and qualitatively, the workshops are making to the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the out-of-school children. However, an effective monitoring system is particularly challenging to develop if there is no access to the children outside of the workshops. It is likely that even out-of-school children know what the "correct" answer is and may provide facilitators with such answers in workshops. However, outside of workshops, facilitators cannot monitor if the children are actually using their acquired knowledge from workshops effectively, or if their behaviour has indeed changed.

Many children at risk of abuse who are made vulnerable by their environment do not have any trusted adults or support system that they can access.

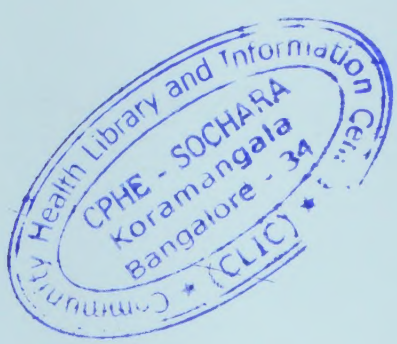
Conclusion

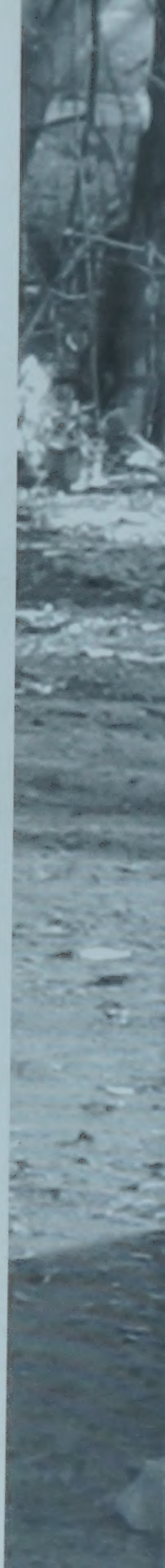
The need for working with children outside of the formal school sector is essential in Pakistan as an overwhelming percentage of children in the country are not enrolled in schools due to economic and social reasons. Such children, however, are vulnerable to a host of risks which can and be alleviated through appropriate knowledge and skills. In each group of children, depending on their age, and economic background and environment, risk assessments can be made by facilitators to address relevant and necessary topics that can help protect the health and well-being of the children. While long term change cannot necessarily be assessed through short workshops, the goal is to at least provide out-of-school children with a knowledge and skill base that can help them to take better care of their bodies. Ultimately, for sustainable growth and development, an investment in the education system that allows children to access schools with trained teachers is required. However, Pakistan is still far from such a goal and current economic conditions do not permit even 50 % of the children in the country to go to school (http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2006/03.23/09-pakistan.html). In the meantime, the need for such children in the informal sector to be provided with information and skills to protect their health and well being is essential.

The goal is to at least provide out-of-school children with a knowledge and skill base that can help them to take better care of their bodies.

Aahung would like to thank the children at the *Faizan-e-Mustafa Madrassa* for providing the learning experience that enabled the development of these guidelines.

Aahung is a non-profit organisation working to promote sexual health and rights in Pakistan. Aahung's programs for youth and children focus on developing life skills that enable children to better protect and care for themselves, build self-esteem and confidence, challenge gender stereotypes, enhance body image, and improve communication skills and assertive behaviour.





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